

THE VALUE OF TODAY

Luke 12:32-40

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

One of the more difficult things for us to do is to live inside the present moment. Our pre-occupation with tomorrow affects us today in different ways. We can become so captivated by what might happen tomorrow that we end up being immobilized by fear. Such folks never go on picnics because it might rain or the ants might attack. Their lives are emptied of even the smallest risk since embracing the status quo always seems to be the more secure and safe option. When we live in such a way, the power of the present is diminished by our obsessive fears about tomorrow. Others of us are so caught up in “what might happen tomorrow” that we have little consciousness of what is actually happening today. Many of us who are fathers fall into this trap. We often spend so much time working, planning, and preparing for the future of our family that we become a stranger to them. Unfortunately, our changing culture has created an environment where it is often true that our children spend more time with caregivers and teachers than parents. The truth is we sacrifice so much for the sake of tomorrow that we miss out on a lot of what today has to offer.

The text for the day speaks an important word for those who are afraid of tomorrow. At first glance the Word spoken in this text by Jesus seems to be a Word filled to the brim with irrational advice. In this text we hear Jesus saying,

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, and unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.

Supposedly, Jesus is offering a prescription for peaceful living. Yet, to us it seems that it is a Word which only heightens our anxiety and concern over the things of tomorrow. Here Jesus is saying,

Do not be afraid,

and in the same breath, he is telling us get rid of the stuff which surrounds us with a sense of security. Not only does He tell us to get rid of it, but He tells us to use the resultant income to give away to the poor. If we practiced what Jesus seems to be preaching, it would seem to us that we would soon be joining the ranks of the poor.

It is certainly fair to say that our 21st century minds have a real problem getting wrapped around what Jesus is saying. We depend on our stuff to give us a measure of peace and security. Having our stuff keeps the fear away at night when we are trying to go to sleep. The stuff may be big bank accounts, it may be our houses, it may be our job, it may be our marriage, or it may be a place filled with familiar comforting things that have

accompanied us through the journey of life. As we see it, doing what Jesus said would cause us to live with a fear that would not register on anyone's scale of fear. Telling us not to be afraid and then telling us to get rid of our stuff is an impossible Word for us to comprehend, much less follow!

What happens is that we get so caught by our first response to what He is saying that we never really get settled enough to understand His words to us. As we take a step back, take a deep breath, and look at the text once more, we hear Jesus saying what really does sound good. He does not want us to live with fear. Fear is a terrible thing. My first memory of fear came shortly after my father died and we moved back to Waycross. My Mother's brother came to live with us. He worked during the day. My Mom worked a night shift at the local honey packaging plant. There were twin beds in my room. I slept in one. My Uncle Alvin was across the room in the other. I remember a time when I started hearing noises in the house at night. My heart would pound so loudly it would drown out the noise I heard in the house. I would become so obsessed with my fear that my mouth would get so dry I could hardly speak. My typical response was to pull the covers up over my head and hide. Maybe I thought that whatever or whoever was making noises would not be able to find me. But, some nights not even hiding under the covers was enough. I would wake up my Uncle and tell him about the noise I was hearing. Usually, he would listen a moment, tell me it was the house creaking, and that I should go back to sleep. However, sometimes that was not enough and I would be rousing him up again in a few minutes. It was only when he told me he would stay awake while I went to find the noise that I lost my fear. I would go trembling, find nothing, and when I returned, he would be awake waiting to reassure me there was nothing to fear. Being afraid is a terrible thing. It immobilizes us and makes us unfit for anything except shaking and trembling.

The text tells us Jesus does not want us to live with the kind of fear that keeps us experiencing completely the moment He is giving to us. His prescription for that kind of life is not so much about getting rid of stuff as realizing how dependent we are on the wrong thing, the wrong stuff, the wrong person. We were not made to depend on ourselves for our security. We were made to depend on God to provide it. This is what the text is all about.

What is the opposite of fear? Some might say "bravery." But, the bravest soldier is not the soldier who has no fear. The bravest soldier is the one who is depends on and is confident in his training, in his equipment, and in his comrades beside him. What Jesus is calling us to understand is that trust and faith in Him will take away fear. His Word is not so much about getting rid of stuff as it is ordering our life so that we depend upon Him and have faith in Him to provide for us. God desires to give to us not the temporal stuff of this life, but the eternal kingdom where life is never lived apart from Him.

The best and most important moment of our life is today. It will not be when we get married, or have children, or get them grown, or retire. The best and most important day of our life is not the one for which we are getting ready, but the one we presently have in hand. What might happen tomorrow should never become so dominant that we are unable to see what is happening today. This passage simply tells us that the life is lived best when we cease trusting in ourselves for tomorrow and start trusting in him for today and whatever tomorrows He might choose to give to us. An old gospel song remembered from childhoods says it well, *"I don't know about tomorrow. I just live from day to day. I don't borrow from its sunshine, For its skies may turn to gray. I don't worry o'er the future, For I know what Jesus said, And today I'll walk beside Him, For He knows what is ahead."* The chorus then says, *"Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand; But I know Who holds tomorrow, and I know Who holds my hand."*

This is the kind of faith and trust Jesus was talking about that day. This is the kind of faith and trust which enables us to live today without fear of what tomorrow might bring. This is the kind of faith and trust with which we were all created to live. Do not rest until this kind of faith is yours.

This sermon preached by the Rev. Bill Strickland at the Richmond Hill Untied Methodist Church in Richmond Hill, Georgia on August 12, 2007.